

Northern Secwepemc te Qelmuw Leadership Council



First Nations establish clear mining policy and rules for resource companies

WILLIAMS LAKE, BC. Dec.1, 2014: The Northern Secwepemc te Qelmuw Leadership Council (comprised of the Xat'sull, T'exelc, Tsq'escen' and Stswecem'c/Xgat'tem First Nations, near the city of Williams Lake, BC) announced today its four First Nations have jointly adopted a comprehensive and detailed mining policy that will be applied to all existing, proposed and future projects that involve or impact on its lands, waters and rights.

The policy, and a companion tool kit to manage its implementation and enforcement, was developed by the Fair Mining Collaborative and covers everything from efforts to stake claims, through every stage of the mining process, to agreement compliance and benefits from operating mines, to mine clean-up. It is a clear statement of leadership and authority by the Northern Secwepemc within their stewardship and title lands.

“Since mining arrived in BC First Nations have been ignored and imposed upon, and more recently, as the courts have reaffirmed our rights, some have argued that they do not know what First Nations want and there are no rules to play by,” said Chief Bev Sellars of the Xat'sull (Soda Creek), First Nation, which first commissioned the project in 2013.

“With this Mining Policy we can no longer be ignored or imposed upon, and the Province and industry can no longer claim they do not know how to work with us – this document spells that out in clear, specific terms,” said Chief Sellars.

Chief Ann Louie of the T'exelc (Williams Lake Indian Band), said: “The Mount Polley tailings pond disaster that has affected our communities has reinforced our decision to proceed with this very carefully developed policy, but the impetus for it was the cumulative effect of more than 150 years of bad mining practices and devastating impacts on First Nations in BC.”

“For years we warned that the Mount Polley dam was a disaster waiting to happen and we were ignored. This NStQ Mining Policy is designed to make sure that this does not happen again, and provide us with the tools to monitor and ensure compliance with safety and all other regulation and conditions imposed on any mines that are allowed,” said Chief Louie.

Tsq'escen' (Canim Lake) Chief Mike Archie said: “This is not a draft document; it is a carefully researched and clearly written policy which states what will be required for any mine work at any level to proceed. And we have developed the tools to ensure our people have the knowledge of First Nations Title and Rights, and mining laws and regulations, to enforce it and ensure compliance with any agreements.

“BC's mining laws need reforming – from free-entry claims staking, to the environmental review process, to the monitoring and enforcement of mine regulations and clean-up commitments - but while British

Columbians are being forced to wait for government and industry to wake up to this reality, we intend to ensure that we reform what happens on our lands.”

Stswecem’c/Xgat’tem (Canoe & Dog Creek First Nation) Chief Patrick Harry said: “This is not about ending all mining. It is about ending the practice of anyone being allowed to stake a claim anywhere they want, exploring wherever they want and developing projects regardless of our rights, concerns and objections.

“It is about making sure the right projects are accepted and done the right way, and that their operation, maintenance and adherence to conditions are monitored. We invite government and industry to work with us on this, not fight against us, as we are offering a way forward that ends confrontation and stagnation.”

Amy Crook, Executive Director of the Fair Mining Collaborative said the NStQ Mining Policy was thoroughly researched, took the best of BC government regulations and the best practices of other jurisdictions in Canada and other countries, and built on excellent work already done by the BC First Nations Mining and Energy Council regarding policies and benefit agreements.

“This policy gives First Nations a practical plan and the tools to back it up. It gives them the recourses to deal with governments and companies as equals from a position of knowledge and strength,” said Ms. Crook.

Dave Porter, CEO of the BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council, welcomed the NStQ Mining Policy, and said he believes industry and all British Columbians stand to benefit from it through more stability and clarity for investment, and improved monitoring and enforcement of mining regulations, conditions and impact on the environment.

“Everyone wants more certainty and to avoid confrontation, bad projects, environmental disasters, and fortunes wasted on stalled and rejected projects,” said Mr. Porter. “I believe First Nations mining policies are essential to achieve this by focusing on sustainable projects whose social and environmental risks do not outweigh the targeted profit benefits for their proponents, and which create genuine shared benefits for all parties.”

Xat’sull First Nation Chief Sellars summed up the policy by saying: “Since colonization it has been the government’s and industry’s way or the highway. That has to change. We are taking the lead in promoting safer and more accountable industry practices in Northern Secwepemc Territory.”

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Link to NStQ Mining Policy: http://northernshuswaptribalcouncil.com/?page_id=765

Link to NStQ Tool Kit: http://northernshuswaptribalcouncil.com/?page_id=765